

Joint Public Hearing on

**Bill 15-572 "Metropolitan Police Department
School Safety and Security Act of 2004"**

**Committee on the Judiciary
Honorable Kathy Patterson, Chair
Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation**

**Honorable Kevin Chavous, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Testimony of Winston Robinson Jr.
Assistant Chief, Regional Operations Command-East
Metropolitan Police Department**

March 29, 2004

Chairpersons Patterson and Chavous, members of the Committees, staff and guests – my name is Winston Robinson, and I am the Assistant Chief in charge of the Metropolitan Police Department's Regional Operations Command-East. I thank you for the opportunity to present this opening statement, updating the Committees on the MPD's recent school safety activities and providing our perspective on the proposed school safety legislation that is now before you. The text of my prepared statement is posted on the MPD's website: www.mpd.dc.gov.

Chief Ramsey was summoned for jury duty today, and regrets that he is unable to be here. He has asked that I represent the Department at this hearing. As Assistant Chief for ROC-East, my area of command includes Ballou Senior High School, where many of our recent school safety efforts have been focused. In addition, I have been actively involved in the discussions around broader school safety issues affecting the District.

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Before looking at the larger issues around school safety, I did want to update the Committees on the situation at Ballou. As you know, Mayor Williams, in his State of the District Address, directed the Metropolitan Police Department to draft a school safety plan for Ballou, in the aftermath of the James Richardson homicide. Our Department completed the draft plan within the 10-day deadline established by the Mayor. We shared our plan with Ballou High and other DC Public Schools officials, and we posted the draft on our website for review by the community at large. In our plan, we tried to be as broad and comprehensive as possible – looking at areas such as security staffing, facility and technology improvements, prevention and intervention activities, and school policies that impact on safety. The plan also included recommendations to DCPS.

We have begun to implement those recommendations over which our Department has control, and we have been working with the school and other entities on those areas that are outside our immediate scope. For example, we temporarily increased from two to six the number of sworn MPD members assigned to the school; there are now five MPD officers and one sergeant at Ballou. In addition, entry control to the building, and security at both the north and south parking lots, have been enhanced by stationing more personnel at these locations.

Working with DCPS security staff and a team of experts from Sandia National Laboratories, MPD staff has reviewed and revised the security technology recommendations in the Ballou plan. Sandia is a recognized leader in this area. It has operated a federally funded program for the past 11 years to research and disseminate information about the appropriate and effective use of security technologies in schools. As part of this review, we submitted a cost estimate to the Mayor for needed technology improvements at Ballou. These include improvements to the metal detection system, cameras, and burglar alarm system; installation of delay egress doors; signage, and visitor and temporary badges – at an estimated cost of \$250,000 dollars. According to DCPS, the delay egress doors alone will cost \$160,000 dollars.

In addition to these physical security enhancements, our Department has intensified its intervention and prevention efforts at Ballou. Conflict Resolution Teams from our Office of Youth Violence Prevention have been visiting the school on a consistent, almost daily basis – both to solicit information about emerging conflicts and to mediate those disagreements before they escalate. We are working closely with the Alliance of Concerned Men on our conflict resolution activities. Also, we have partnered with the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership on a number of initiatives to address the underlying causes of youth violence. For example, we jointly hosted a "Girl Talk" conference this past Saturday, and our Policing for

Prevention Division is working to bring community policing to Ballou through its Youth Problem Solving Partnership program. Our Office of Youth Violence Prevention is also developing a "parent awareness" brochure that will help parents and guardians throughout the District recognize and respond to warning signs of trouble with their children.

As you can see, we have made progress on some of the key recommendations contained in the Ballou School Safety Plan. Many of the recommendations, however, require additional action by DCPS and other agencies. We continue to work with these entities on prioritizing those recommendations, analyzing costs and determining how to move forward.

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Beyond Ballou, our Department has taken some preliminary steps to assess school safety needs on a citywide basis. As mentioned earlier, a team from the Sandia National Laboratories visited DC last month to review our Ballou plan and conduct a preliminary assessment of school security technology and practices.

Our Department has also developed a collaborative relationship with Cathy Reilly, Director of SHAPPE - the Senior High Alliance of Principals, Parents and Educators. We have had several discussions with Ms. Reilly to identify the key concerns of her group. And she has provided assistance in developing an informal risk assessment survey, which upon Ms. Reilly's invitation, we began implementing at the last SHAPPE meeting. The purpose of the survey is to gather information from the people who are most knowledgeable about our schools – administrators, principals, parents, teachers, students, officers and others-about the schools in our city at highest risk for violence. Irrespective of any changes that may be made in the management of school security, it is clear that the input and expertise of groups such as SHAPPE, our PTAs and others must be incorporated into our plans.

In addition, MPD staff continues to research how other major cities are handling school safety and what the current "best practices" are.

Internally, our Department has reviewed the deployment of our existing School Resource Officers. Right now, we have 49 officers assigned to the senior high, junior high and middle schools in the DCPS system. It is important to remember that the MPD has had officers in DC Public Schools for decades, so this role is not new. Nevertheless, we have heard the concerns of some community members that more police are not wanted in the schools-that more police might increase tensions, instead of alleviate them. From our standpoint, additional officers in schools will not change the fundamental role served by the officers who currently assigned there: to improve the learning environment of the school. By their very presence, uniformed officers communicate the expectation that schools are to be safe and orderly environments. They communicate that appropriate behavior is expected.

We expect that the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services – or COPS – will soon be announcing new funding for School Resource Officers. Our Department plans to apply for these funds so that we can both increase the number of SROs within the MPD and enhance their effectiveness through additional training and support. Any additional School Resource Officers would be assigned based on our assessment of the needs of individual schools. Regardless of the direction ultimately taken on the management of school security, it is our belief that having more School Resource Officers will enhance the overall safety of our

schools. And because these will be additional federally funded officers, we can enhance school safety without diminishing neighborhood patrols.

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Over the past several weeks, our Department has begun to take the necessary steps to put our agency in a better position to assume additional responsibilities for school safety citywide. We believe that an appropriate role for the MPD would be to provide on-site direction and supervision of the contract security personnel, as well as overall management of school security operations. Strengthening the command-and-control structure can only improve accountability for the performance of school security personnel.

But as I indicated at the beginning of this statement, having the MPD take over school security involves much more than putting a few more officers in the schools and assuming management of the contract for private security. Even if the MPD were to be given primary responsibility for the management of security of our schools, achieving our goal of safe schools will require a lot of collaborative work involving DCPS, MPD, and a host of other agencies and organizations, as described by City Administrator Robert Bobb.

We need to keep in mind that physical security is just one aspect of the total school safety picture – and, if research and experience hold true, it may not even be the most important aspect. School leadership, school policies, academic curricula, athletics and other extra-curricular activities are all essential elements of the school safety equation. Aligning and coordinating all of these different elements – including the element of physical security – represent the biggest challenge we face.

Chief Ramsey and Interim Schools Superintendent Massie recently met on this issue. And they are in total agreement that in order to improve school safety, all of us need to think more broadly than just moving authority for security management over to the police. Both the Chief and the Superintendent agree that school safety is a complex problem. Solving it will require that we put together the right team of people, that we share and analyze a broad range of information, and that we work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive school safety plan that is both effective and workable.

With that perspective in mind, I would like to articulate a few principles that the MPD believes must be implemented, if our responsibility for school security is indeed expanded.

- First, the MPD and DCPS must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that spells out the roles and commitments of both parties. Experts in school safety are nearly unanimous in their assertion that the direct involvement of school principals and other administrators is critical, especially in areas such as greeting students, checking IDs, monitoring attendance, and controlling hallways and lunchrooms. The safest and most successful schools – including schools right here in the District – do not turn over these responsibilities to the police or contract security employees. They embed these types of activities into the very core of their school management and administration. We believe that formalizing the relationship between the schools and the police is a necessary first step in the process – spelling out in an MOU exactly who is responsible for what, and how we are to work together to achieve safe schools. Chief Ramsey and Superintendent Massie have committed to establishing an inter-disciplinary working group that will be responsible for researching and developing a citywide school safety plan, including a formal MOU between our two agencies.

- One part of this MOU would have to encompass the need for detailed security assessments in all of our schools. As we have learned in just our brief discussions with Sandia Labs and others, security assessments involve much more than deciding where a CCTV camera is located. In other cities, the schools and police have embarked upon a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary effort to evaluate the full gamut of policies, procedures, facilities and technologies that impact safety. The MPD and DCPS will need to form a similar partnership on school security assessments here.
- Next, if the MPD is to be responsible for the management of school security, we must have the resources to staff the school security function from top to bottom. This will require not only more School Resource Officers and/or contract security personnel, but also supervisors, program analysts and managers, contract monitors, technology experts and others. We cannot take on this responsibility – and do it well – simply by adding a few more officers. If we are to make a commitment to this approach, that commitment must be supported by a major investment in resources. This type of comprehensive, top-to-bottom staffing is the model that New York City has adopted. There are other models that we continue to explore these. But the bottom line is that the staffing needs for this endeavor will be substantial.
- I mentioned earlier our plans to seek federal funding for more School Resource Officers. If we receive that funding, we will also need funds to support the expanded role of the SROs under the federal program. To be effective, School Resource Officers must be much more than door guards and hall monitors. They must be part of the fabric of the schools to which they are assigned – involved in a wide range of school activities and programs that impact safety and bring community policing to the schools. Achieving that expanded role will require substantial training for the officers and other security personnel, as well as buy-in and support from the schools.
- Of course, resource needs will go far beyond personnel. Equipment and technology will always play a central role in physical security – everything from delay egress doors and student identification and attendance systems, to closed circuit television and metal detectors. If the responsibility for the management of school security is shifted to the MPD, then the MPD must be a full partner in all related technology acquisition and operation.

All of these aspects of a comprehensive school safety function point to one final issue I want to highlight: if the MPD is to assume primary responsibility for the management of security in our schools, we will need both time and resources to prepare for the transition. And we will need to work closely and actively with the DC Public Schools during this period – a commitment that is shared by both Chief Ramsey and DCPS leadership.

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I want to thank the Committees for your interest in this process and for your careful consideration of the myriad issues that are involved. You understand – as Chief Ramsey and the MPD certainly understand – that crime and disorder problems in our communities cannot be separated from the crime and disorder problems in our schools. Our schools are part of the larger community, and it is almost inevitable that the safety issues in the community will impact safety in the schools, and vice versa.

Mayor Williams, as well as members of the Council, have proposed that there be a single point of accountability for public safety in our city – both in our communities and in our schools. The MPD stands ready and committed to continue working cooperatively with the DC Public Schools, the Mayor, the Council, advocacy organizations, and all of the other entities and individuals that have a stake in the safety of our schools. We look forward to the day when none of our students ever contemplates – much less, succeeds in – bringing a gun into a school and shooting a fellow student. That is a goal that we should be able to achieve, as long as we remain committed to working together.

Thank you. Staff and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.